اِنَّ هٰذَا الْقُرْاٰنَ يَهْدِيْ لِلَّتِيْ هِيَ اَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ الَّذِيْنَ يَعْمَلُوْنَ الصّٰلِحٰتِ اَنَّ لَهُمْ اَجْرًا كَبِيْرًا

Quran English Translation and Tafseer

Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi

Surah Al-Masad (The Palm Fibre) -111

سُوْرَةُ اللَّهَبِ مَكِّيَّةٌ

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

(In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate**)**

تَبَّتْ يَدَآ اَبِيْ لَهَبٍ وَّتَبَّ ؕ ١

(111-1) Destroyed were the hands of Abu Lahab, and he lay utterly doomed. (1)

(1) His real name was Abd al-Uzza, and he was called Abu Lahab on account of his glowing, ruddy complexion. Lahab means the flame of fire, and Abu Lahab the one with a flaming, fiery face. His being mentioned here by his nickname (Kunyat), instead of his real name, has several reasons. First, that he was better known by his nickname than by his real name; second, that the Quran did not approve that he should be mentioned by his polytheistic name Abd al Uzza (slave of Uzza); third, that his kunyat goes well with the fate that has been described of him in this Surah.

Some commentators have translated tabbat yada Abi Lahab to mean: May the hands of Abu Lahab be broken, and tabba to mean: may he perish or he perished. But this, in fact, was not a curse which was invoked on him, but a prophecy in which an event taking place in the future, has been described in the past tense, to suggest that its occurrence in the future is certain and inevitable.

In fact, at last the same thing happened as had been foretold in this Surah a few years earlier. Breaking of the hands obviously does not imply breaking of the physical hands, but a person’s utterly failing in his aim and object for which he has exerted his utmost. And Abu Lahab indeed had exerted his utmost to defeat and frustrate the message of Islam presented by the Prophet (peace be upon him). But hardly seven or eight years after the revelation of this Surah most of the big chiefs of Quraish, who

were a party with Abu Lahab in his hostility to Islam, were killed in the Battle of Badr. When the news of the defeat reached Makkah, he was so shocked that he could not survive for more than seven days. His death occurred in a pitiable state. He became afflicted with malignant pustule and the people of his house left him to himself, fearing contagion. No one came near his body for three days after his death, until the body decomposed and began to stink. At last, when the people began to taunt his sons, according to one tradition, they hired some black people, who lifted his body and buried it.

According to another tradition, they got a pit dug out and threw his body into it by pushing it with wood, and covered it up with earth and stones. His utter failure became manifest when the religion which he had tried his utmost to impede and thwart, was accepted by his own children. First of all, his daughter, Darrah, migrated from Makkah to Madinah and embraced Islam; then on the conquest of Makkah, both his sons, Utbah and Muattab, came before the Prophet (peace be upon him) through the mediation of Abbas, believed and took oath of allegiance to him.

مَا اَغْنٰی عَنْهُ مَالُهٗ وَ مَا كَسَبَ ؕ ۲

(111-2) His wealth did not avail him, nor his acquisitions. (2)

(2) Abu Lahab was a stingy, materialistic man. Ibn Jarir has stated that once in the pre-Islamic days he was accused of having stolen two golden deer from the treasury of the Kabah. Though later the deer were recovered from another person, the fact that he was accused of stealing indicates the opinion the people of Makkah held of him. About his riches Qadi Rashid bin Zubair writes in his Adh-Dhakhair wat- Tuhaf: He was one of the four richest men of the Quraish, who owned one qintar (about 260 oz) of gold each. His love of wealth can be judged from the fact that when on the occasion of the battle of Badr the fate of his religion was going to be decided forever, and all the Quraish chiefs had personally gone to fight, he sent Aas bin Hisham to fight on his

own behalf, telling him: This is in lieu of the debt of four thousand dirhams that you owe to me. Thus, he contrived a plan to realize his debt, for Aas had become bankrupt and there was no hope of the recovery of the debt from him.

Some commentators have taken maa kasaba in the meaning of the earning, i.e. the benefits that accrued to him from his wealth were his kasab (earning), and some other commentators have taken it to imply children, for the Prophet (peace be upon him) has said that a man's son also is his kasab (earning). (Abu Daud, Ibn Abi Hatim). Both these meanings fully correspond to the fate met by Abu Lahab. For when he was afflicted with the malignant pustule, his wealth availed him nothing, and his children also left him alone to die a miserable, wretched death. They did not even bury him honorably. Thus, within a few years the people witnessed how the prophecy which had been made in this Surah about Abu Lahab was literally fulfilled.

سَيَصْلٰى نَارًا ذَاتَ لَهَبٍ ۚ ٣

(111-3) Surely, he will be cast into a Flaming Fire

وَّامْرَاَتُهٗ ؕ حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ ۚ ٤

(111:4) along with his wife, [3] that carrier of slanderous tales; [4]

(3) Her name was Arwa and her nickname (kunyat) Umm Jamil. She was sister of Abu Sufyan and was no less bitter than her husband, Abu Lahab, in her enmity to the Messenger (peace be upon him). Abu Bakr's daughter Asma has related that when this Surah was revealed, and Umm Jamil heard it, she was filled with rage and went out in search of the Prophet (peace be upon him). She carried a handful of stones and she was crying some verses of her own, satirizing the Prophet (peace be upon him). She came to the Kabah, where the Prophet (peace be upon him) was sitting

with Abu Bakr. The latter said: O Messenger of Allah, there she comes and I fear lest she should utter something derogatory to you. The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: She will not see me. The same thing happened. She could not see the Prophet (peace be upon him) although he was there. She said to Abu Bakr: I hear that your companion has satirized me. Abu Bakr replied: No, by the Lord of this house, he has not satirized you. Hearing this she went off. (Ibn Abi Hatim, Ibn Hisham; Bazzar has related an incident on the authority of Abdullah bin Abbas also, which closely resembles this). What Abu Bakr meant was that she had not been satirized by the Prophet (peace be upon him), but by Allah Himself.

(4) The words in the original are hammalat al-hatab, which literally mean: carrier of the wood. The commentators have given several meanings of it. Abdullah bin Abbas, Ibn Zaid, Dahhak and Rabi bin Anas say: She used to strew thorns at the Prophet's (peace be upon him) door in the night; therefore, she has been described as carrier of the wood. Qatadah, Ikrimah, Hasan Basri, Mujahid and Sufyan Thauri say: She used to carry evil tales and slander from one person to another in order to create hatred between them; therefore, she has been called the bearer of wood idiomatically. Saaid bin Jubair says: The one who is loading himself with the burden of sin is described idiomatically in Arabic as: Fulan-un Yahtatibu ala zahri bi (so and so is loading wood on his back); therefore, hummalat al-hatab means: The one who carries the burden of sin. Another meaning which the commentators have also given is: she will do this in the Hereafter, i.e. she will bring and supply wood to the fire in which Abu Lahab would be burning.

فِىۡ جِيۡدِهَا حَبۡلٌ مِّنۡ مَّسَدٍ ۝٥

(111:5) upon her neck shall be a rope of palm-fibre. (5)

(5) The word used for her neck is jeed, which in Arabic means a neck decorated with an ornament. Saeed bin al- Musayyab, Hasan

Basri and Qatadah say that she wore a valuable necklace and used to say: By Lat and Uzza, I will sell away this necklace and spend the price to satisfy my enmity against Muhammad (peace be upon him). That is why the word jeed has been used here ironically, thereby implying that in Hell she would have a rope of palm-fiber round her neck instead of that necklace upon which she prides herself so arrogantly. Another example of this ironical style is found at several places in the Quran in the sentence: Bashshir-hum bi-adhab-in alima “Give them the good news of a painful torment.

The words habl-um min-masad have been used for the rope which will be put round her neck, i.e. it will be a rope of the masad kind. Different meanings of this have been given by the lexicographers and commentators. According to some, masad means a tightly twisted rope; others say that masad is the rope made from palm-fiber; still others say that it means the rope made from rush, or camel-skin, or camelhair. Still another view is that it implies a cable made by twisted iron strands together.